

VZCZCXYZ0039
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDM #0431/01 1291337
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 091337Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3433
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6785
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4514
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3135
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7658
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1733
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5068
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1275
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7400

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 000431

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Syria/Cuba, Syria/Libya, Syria/US, Syria/France, Lebanon,
Iraq (5/9)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on May 9 reported Information Minister Mohsen Bilal's meeting on May 8 with Cuban MP Kenia Serrano, during which Bilal stressed Syria's concern to achieve stability and security in the Middle East through a just and comprehensive peace based on UN resolutions. Talks also dealt with the role of the media in demonstrating nations' common issues, referring to the importance of activating media exchange between Syria and Cuba in the interest of both countries. On Iraq, Bilal confirmed Syria's support of Iraq's territorial integrity and of reconciliation among the Iraqi people as a way out of their dilemma. Serrano stressed Cuba's support of Syria's positions on Arab issues.

On Syrian/Libyan relations, papers reported Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad's meeting on May 8 with Mohammad al-Taher Hammudah Sealah, Assistant Secretary of the Libyan General People's Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation, who is participating in meetings of the Syrian-Libyan Joint Committee in Damascus. Talks centered on the latest political developments in the region, particularly in Iraq and Palestine, bilateral relations and the situation in Africa. Dr. Miqdad briefed the Libyan official on Syria's positions on events in the region, referring to the importance of boosting joint Arab action to face regional challenges. Mr. Sealah expressed satisfaction with Syrian-Libyan relations, stressing the importance of meetings of the Syrian-Libyan Joint Committee.

All papers reported a lecture on May 8 at the Faculty of Civil Engineering at Damascus University by Hizbollah Deputy Secretary General Sheikh Naeem Qasem, who maintained that "President Asad's wisdom and honorable positions have made Syria respected by everyone." He confirmed that "Syria's strength and steadfastness give strength to the National Resistance in Lebanon." Sheikh Qasem also praised the Syrian people's assistance to the Lebanese people during the Israeli war on Lebanon last July. Al-Qasem criticized attempts by some superpowers, along with Israel, to control the region's resources, saying that "these superpowers sow sedition to achieve their goals." He called for confronting these plans through cooperation and by eliminating sedition.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"Deputy Secretary General of Hizbollah Sheikh Naeem Qassem: President Asad's wisdom has made Syria respected by everyone. Lebanese opposition: Al-Saniara's provocative statements are a new attempt to please Feltman" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/9)

"Syrian-Cuban talks on media cooperation. Bilal: Peace must be in accordance with international resolutions" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/9)

"Deputy FM Miqdad reviews current regional developments and horizons of Syrian-Libyan relations with Mohammad al-Taher Hammudah Sealah, Assistant Secretary of the Libyan General People's Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/9)

"Israeli occupation troops attack Khan Yunis and Beit Hanoun as prelude to an extensive military operation. The Israeli army plans to establish a buffer zone in Gaza" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/9)

"Secret talks between Olmert and Abbas. An open meeting will be held next week" (Independent al-Watan)

"Former Palestinian PM Qurei is to visit Damascus soon to pave the way for a meeting of Palestinian factions in Cairo" (Independent al-Watan, 5/9)

"Victims of explosions in Baghdad, Diyala and Kufa exceed 100. Two US soldiers killed. New US troops will be sent to Iraq" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/9)

"Democrats enter the circle of confrontation: Bush must change his policy in Iraq before the end of the year" (Government-owned

Al-Ba'th, 5/9)

"Additional US troops will be sent to Iraq. The US presidential race enflames confrontation between Bush and the Congress" (Independent al-Watan, 5/9)

"Protests continue in France: 995 vehicles burned, 740 individuals arrested. Mediterranean unity is top priority for Sarkozy" (Independent al-Watan, 5/9)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"The Constructive Dialogue"

Omar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (5/9): "The US administration has supposedly realized that Syria is not to blame for the problems and tensions that afflict the region and that Syria was and still is a factor of stability and a country seeking good relations with all countries of the world, and with the United States in particular, as the superpower and the sponsor of the peace process. The US Administration has also supposedly realized that dialogue with Syria is a constructive process that serves common American and Arab interests, which are numerous, when it is held on the basis of international law, UN resolutions, human rights, and even values of the US constitution itself.

"From the Baker-Hamilton report and recommendations, which stressed the need for dialogue with Syria in view of its pivotal role in the region, to the successive visits to Damascus by American and European figures and delegations, to the dialogue that was held with Condoleezza Rice in Sharm al-Sheikh, facts have proven that the American boycott of Syria is unjustified and that it does not serve US policy as the US administration endeavors to remove tensions and find effective solutions to pending problems in the region.

"The leaking of press reports on the results of all these meetings shows that the principle of managing crises, rather than resolving them, is no longer useful, and that the Arab region no longer tolerates playing on contradictions. The region has suffered a great deal as a result of foreign interference and the failure to observe international resolutions, so much so that the peoples of this region see in US policy nothing but futile adherence to a strategy that conflicts with the logic of law and justice,

especially when it comes to Israel....

"It is now hoped that the US Administration has revised its calculations and sensed the soundness of Syria's position toward the entire situation in the region. It is hoped that it has realized that pressure and boycott are not the right ways, but rather UN resolutions and constructive dialogue on the basis of rights and the law. This is Syria's permanent demand."

"Beginning of an Awakening"

Ali Qasim, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (5/9):

"The conflict between the Congress and the White House over Iraq and the need for withdrawal of American forces from that country shows that Americans have started to wake up from the state that drove them to unconditional support for everything the US Administration did and unquestioning belief in everything it said....

"The US domestic scene is now rife with ideas and views that are not only different from what the US Administration is proposing, but that also can open the doors to new discussions that can put an end to the adventure in US policy...."

"The New Identity of the Elysee"

Dr. Sa'id Musallam, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (5/9): "We hope that the tension that Chirac caused in Syrian-French relations will end now that France has a new president.

"We hope that French policy, under Nicolas Sarkozy, will pay less attention to the criteria from which the previous administration proceeded and will focus on higher interests, not personal issues....

"Relations between the two countries need to be purified, especially

since Sarkozy wants France to continue to play an prominent political role in the Mediterranean region. This requires that the political identity of his term in office be determined in a way that suits this hoped-for role. This depends on Sarkozy's next policies...."

Corbin